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Message Text

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PAGE 01 STOCKH 05710 111101Z

17
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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---------- 087766
R 111020Z NOV 75
FM AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6135
INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE STOCKHOLM 5710

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, SW
SUBJECT: AHLMARK ELECTED LIBERAL PARTY CHAIRMAN

REF: STOCKHOLM 4141

1. BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED. PER AHLMARK WAS ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF THE LIBERAL PARTY AT THE PARTY CONGRESS HELD THIS WEEKEND IN STOCKHOLM. ELECTION OF THE 36 YEAR-OLD AHLMARK HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED SINCE FORMER PARTY CHAIRMAN GUNNAR HELEN ANNOUNCED HIS DECISION TO RETIRE LAST AUGUST (REFTEL). AHLMARK WAS THE ONLY CANDIDATE FOR THE PARTY'S TOP POST.

2. IN HIS ACCEPTANCE SPEECH AHLMARK STATED THAT THE LIBERAL PARTY "STANDS FOR SOCIAL REFORMS WITHOUT SOCIALISM," ASSERTING THAT THIS IS A PROGRAM "HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS CAN ACCEPT." AHLMARK STRESSED THAT HIS MAIN TASK WILL BE TO ESTABLISH A CLEAR "PROFILE" FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY, DIFFERENT FROM BOTH THAT OF THE SOCIAL DEMO-CRATS AND THE OTHER TWO OPPOSITION PARTIES, THE CENTER AND MODERATES. END UNCLASSIFIED.

3. BEGIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE. COMMENT: LIBERAL PARTY
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PAGE 02 STOCKH 05710 111101Z

SUPPORTERS HOPE THAT THE ELECTION OF THE YOUTHFUL AND

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DYNAMIC (BUT ALSO CONTROVERSIAL) AHLMARK TO THE PARTY'S LEADERSHIP WILL HALT THE STEADY DOWNWARD DRIFT IN THE PARTY'S FORTUNES THROUGHOUT THE 1970'S. THE MOST RECENT POLLS SHOW THE PARTY'S POPULAR STANDING AT 7.5 PERCENT, DOWN FROM ITS FIGURE OF 9.4 PERCENT IN THE 1973 ELECTIONS.

4. THE KEY QUESTION IS WHICH DIRECTION AHLMARK WILL ENDEAVOR TO MOVE THE PARTY. ALTHOUGH LEFT-LEADING DAGENS NYHETER ASSERTS NOVEMBER 10 THAT THE ELECTION OF AHLMARK SHOULD MAKE CONTINUATION OF HELEN'S POLICY OF COOPERATION WITH THE RULING SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY POSSIBLE, THE GENERAL VIEW IN SWEDISH POLITICAL CIRCLES IS THAT THE DEFINITELY NON-SOCIALIST AHLMARK WILL BE MORE INCLINED TO COOPERATE WITH THE OPPOSITION THAN WORK WITH THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE WITH REGARD TO THE CENTER PARTY, WHOSE LEADER, THORBJORN FALLDIN, IS HIS GOOD FRIEND. HOWEVER, FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, AHLMARK IS LIKELY TO TRY TO STEER A COURSE MIDWAY BETWEEN THE TWO CAMPS IN ORDER TO DEVELOP A DISTINCTLY LIBERAL "PROFILE" BEFORE THE SEPTEMBER 1976 ELECTIONS. THEN, IF THE NON-SOCIALIST PARTIES WIN A MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT, AHLARK WOULD IN ALL PROBABILITY JOIN WITH THE OTHER TWO BOURGEOIS PARTIES IN FORMING A GOVERNMENT.

5. THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP IS KNOWN TO HAVE VIEWED THE ASCENT OF AHLMARK TO THE PARTY CHAIRMANSHIP WITH A NOTABLE LACK OF ENTHUSIASM, PREFERRING INSTEAD THE OTHER YOUTHFUL LEADER, THE MORE CONCILIATORY, OLA ULLSTEN. AHLMARK IS REGARDED AS A HARD-HITTING, EFFECTIVE DEBATER, WITH A PENCHANT TOWARDS CONFRONTATION UNUSUAL FOR A SWEDISH POLITICIAN. HE MAY WELL GIVE THE PARTY THE SHOT IN THE ARM IT SO BADLY NEEDS. AT THE VERY LEAST, HIS ASSUMPTION OF THE LIBERAL PARTY CHAIRMANSHIP SHOULD ENLIVEN THE SWEDISH POLITICAL SCENE DURING THE 10 MONTHS PRECEDING THE NEXT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. (SEE REFTEL FOR BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON AHLMARK)
STRAUSZ-HUPE'

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